2: Covarrubias R-5 (1930-1933) 1938
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CHAPTER VII

ART AND THE ARTIST

THE PLACE OF THE ARTIST IN BALINESE LIFE

Everybody in Bali seems to be an artist. Coolies and princes, priests and peasants, men and women alike, can dance, play musical instruments, paint, or carve in wood and stone. It was often surprising to discover that an otherwise poor and dilapitated village harboured an elaborate temple, a great orchestra, or a group of actors of repute.

One of the most famous orchestras in Bali is to be found in the remote mountain village of Selat, and the finest dancers of *legong* were in Saba, an unimportant little village hidden among the ricefields. Villages such as Mas, Batuan, Gelgel, are made up of families of painters, sculptors, and actors, and Sanur produces, besides priests and witch-doctors, fine story-tellers and dancers. In Sebatu, another isolated mountain village, even the children can carve little statues from odd bits of wood, some to be used as bottle-stoppers, perches for birds, handles, but most often simply absurd little human figures in comic attitudes, strange animals, birds of their own invention, frogs, snakes, larvæ of insects, figures without reason or purpose, simply as an outlet for their creative urge. In contrast to the devil-may-care primitive works of Sebatu are the super-refined, masterful carvings from Badung, Ubud, Pliatan, and especially those by the family of

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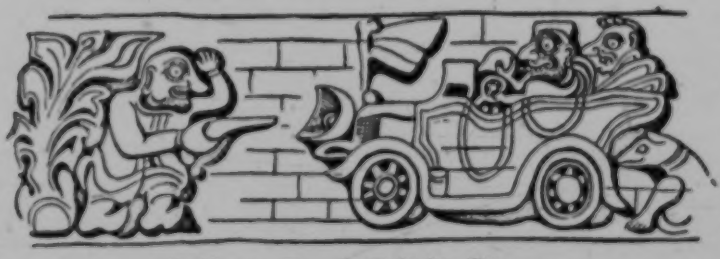
346 drinking beer; a soldier raping a girl; or a man on a bicycle with
531 two great flowers for wheels. Fantastic pornographic subjects
[891] are always a source of hilarious comedy and in many temples in
[522] both North and South Bali such subjects are found as temple decorations. As if the mad tangle of stone vegetation were not enough, in North Bali they outline the decorations with white paint to make them even more conspicuous, and in villages like Babetin, Ringdikit, and Djagaraga the overpowering decoration



A Hold-up, a Temple Relief in Djagaraga

is painted in bright blue, red, and yellow, giving as a result the wildest and most unrestrained effects.

322 The art of wood-carving has suffered a curious transformation
532 since our first visit to Bali in 1930. Then the majority of the objects carved in wood were made for utilitarian purposes: from carved doors and beams for houses, musical instruments, masks for dramatic shows, handles for implements, to little statues of deities and other ritual accessories. These were of the conventional contemporary Balinese style: flowers and curlicues in high relief for flat surfaces (*ukiran*), and for sculpture in the round (*togog*), statues of divinities, demons, and other characters of mythology dressed in classical attire and profusely ornamented. Furthermore, all wood-carvings were meant to be covered with paint, lacquer, or goldleaf and only in exceptional cases was the wood left in its raw state. There were unusual pieces, but they
532 were freaks among the predominant styles.
322 Travellers had started to buy Balinese carvings, however, and
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on our return to Bali three years later, the Balinese sculptors were turning out mass-production "objets d'art" for tourists. Even before arriving in Bali for the second time, we found the curio-shops of Macassar and Java filled with statuettes of a decidedly commercial style which was totally new to us. Before this we had made acquaintance with Gusti Ngurah Gedé, an old man of Pemetjutan rated among the best sculptors of South Bali. Although Gusti Gedé was so old that he talked with difficulty,

Relief in the Temple of Kubutambahan

he could carve the most delicate motifs in hard wood with a precision and sureness envied by the younger sculptors. He had started to make realistic little statues of nude girls, bathing, combing their hair, or in the process of undressing, masterfully carved out of a fine-grained white wood, figures that found ready sale among travellers. This was perhaps the beginning of a new art in which the sculptor began working for a new public: tourists who had little appreciation of the technical perfection demanded by the Balinese, or foreign artists who preferred line and form to intricate ornamentation.

This necessarily introduced the mercenary element into Balinese art, until then non-existent; prices were boosted and the sculptor suddenly became aware that there was a good income in making statues. On the other hand, this same condition gave

2: Covarrubias R-5 (1930-1933) 1938
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532 the art a new impulse, and sculptors sprang up like mushrooms.
422 Soon every important artistic centre, such as Den Pasar, Mas,
439 Batuan, Pliatan, and Ubud, was turning out quantities of carv-
443 ings in new styles, mediocre heads of *djanger* dancers snatched up by round-the-world tourists, stereotyped slim figures from Mas exported to Java and Holland; while the splendid sculptors from Badung and Batuan carved coconut shells from Bangli and so forth.

322 Gusti Gedé was also the master of a school of sculptors and
532 every morning boys from the town went to his house to re-
874 ceive lessons and to assist him. Some of his pupils were already fine carvers and could turn out statues almost as finished as those of the master. In his school we had the opportunity to observe the technique of wood-carving, which is considerably more refined and requires greater skill than the carvings in *parás* stone.
[824] Hard woods such as teak (*djatí*), jackfruit (*nangka*), and the compact *sawo*, a beautiful dark red wood, are invariably used and the sculptor must have a sure hand, trained by the experience of years, and a good knowledge of the art of cutting into the grain of the wood. He uses every conceivable form of knives,
[413] chisels, and gouges: round, straight, slanting, V-shaped, and so forth, some of which are intended for exceptionally deep carving. A complete set of tools consists of some thirty instruments and a wooden mallet. The carving technique consists in chipping bits of wood gradually with the highly sharpened instruments, not by hand pressure, as among us, but with light taps of the mallet, obtaining in this manner delicacy of touch and greater control over the material. If the statue is not to be painted or gilded, it is made smooth with pumice and given a high polish by rubbing it with bamboo.

532 *Painting:* Unlike the arts of the theatre, music, and sculpture, painting was little in evidence as a living art on our first visit to Bali. Outside of painting artifacts of daily use and scant decorations for temples, the Balinese made only paintings of two

2: Covarrubias R-5 (1930-1933) - 1938
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(*Photos by Walter Spies*)

ABOVE: A *Tjili* of Fried Rice Flour that tops an offering from Duda

BELOW: A Wood Carving apparently representing a water-buffalo's head, from the *balé agung* of Satra

[p202 (B)]

3: Belo E-5 (1931-1939) 1953 OF7 Bali OF7

Groups of women

*796 799 [415] began to gather under the roofs of the other pavilions, to fashion from the sheaves of young palm leaves the many and varied containers that would be needed for the offerings. Hundreds of these are required, big ones, small ones, round, square, and triangular ones, each to be cut out, twisted into shape, and pinned together with bamboo slivers. The more dexterous of the women assumed the task of fashioning the decorative top-pieces (*sampian*) with many curls and whorls and flutings, and graceful fringes hanging all around, which would adorn the offerings.

[252] When the rice-flour was ready, colored in vivid red and green, the specialists in *peregèmbal* cakes set to work molding it into distinctive shapes: the *paksi*, a bird with knobby buttons down the front of his jacket, the *doekoeh ngaba sihoeh*, a "hermit holding a coconut full of water," the magical *waringin* tree. Other women were frying flat round cakes, and setting them to sun in the middle of the court. A special set of offerings was prepared at once to be presented in each of the ten shrines in the temple court and in the kitchen, "because the offerings were being made in the temple."

[082] This giving of offerings for making offerings may be interpreted either as a polite gesture towards the gods, a gracious way of letting them know that the temple, their house, was being used for this purpose — or as a precautionary measure, to appease their appetites so that nothing should go amiss while the big offerings were being prepared. In each shrine was set an *adjoeman* (food) and a *tjanang*[1] (betel-chewing ingredients).

Meanwhile, the men who had come to work instead of their wives sat together splitting up bamboo to be used for offering frames, for skewers, needles for the pinning of the delicate palm-leaf fancy-work, or supports for the construction of special altars and stands on which the offerings would be set out. [322]

Towards noon the hundred or so people departed, leaving the *sinoman* in charge. Again about three the *koel-koel* beat, recalling them to the temple. And the work went on, till the evening. That night a detachment of ten men was detailed to sleep in the temple, to guard it (*mekemit*).

[1] The *tjanang* is the slightest and the most frequently used offering, serving a multitude of purposes. It is a little tray made of palm-leaf, containing a flower, ingredients for betel-chewing in minuscule quantity, and a twist of palm-leaf called an "oil receptacle" (*wadah lengis*), a mere token of perfumed oil. Besides these it may contain tiny amounts or tokens of perfumed ointment and sandalwood water. Three specific types of *tjanang* may be called for: [782] [276] [302]

1. *Tjanang yenten*, contains *porosan* (roll of betel), *boenga* (flower), *wadah lengis* (oil receptacle).
2. *Tjanang lenga wangi*, or *tjanang boerat wangi*, contains *porosan*, *boenga*, *wadah lengis*, as above, *borèh mijik* (perfumed ointment), *lengis kodjo* (other perfumed oil), *jèh tjenana* (sandalwood water).
3. *Tjanang gantal*, contains *lekesan* (roll of areca nut, betel-leaf, lime, and tobacco), *bocah 5* (areca nuts, 5), *wadah lengis*.

3: Belo E-5 (1931-1939) 1953 OF7 Bali OF7

great *lamaks* hung without. It is also customary to hang green leaves (*don gegirang*) from the doors. The ceremonial parasols decorated with gold-leaf were stuck into the ground before the *Pepelik* and the *Padmasana*, shrine to the Sun. Beside them stood the tall spears, their shafts ringed with bands of silver. All the available raised platforms were crowded with the finished or nearly finished offerings, and within the temple court it looked indeed as if the party were about to begin.

But there was still much work to do. The men were busy cutting the hundreds of bamboo skewers needed for grilling parts of the pig to be killed next morning. The women's flying fingers were finishing off the last dozens of leaf-containers. A group of five unmarried girls had gathered around to make the fragile *tjanang rébong*, left till the last. They took up flowers and neatly impaled each on a bamboo stick. Then, working from a base of a clay pedestal (*sesendèn*) on which stood a section of the pithy banana-stalk, they inserted the ends of the flower-sticks into this center, in such a way as to build up a solid cone of varicolored flowers. The base was hung with a fringe of young palm-leaf, and the whole topped with a fan-shaped ornament, also of young palm-leaf, called a *linggih-linggihan*. This most important creation, not so much an offering as a part of the regalia of the gods, will accompany them everywhere when they have "come down," and appear and reappear in many rituals. With it goes the *rantasan*, a set of clothes or "wardrobe" of the gods, and the "toilet-tray," the *pebersihan* (or *pesoetjian*), a wooden tray containing a mirror, two sorts of combs, little bowls of cosmetics, a cleansing brush of palm-weavings (*peboeoe*), a container for water, and the customary *tjanangs*. As the meaning of this toilet-tray was sufficiently clear, we asked the priest what was the significance of the *tjanang rébong*[2] which goes with it. His answer was "*Artin mepajas*," the meaning of it is dressing up.

On this last night of the preparations as on the previous nights, a new group of men took their turn (*ririgan*) to guard the temple. But on the following night, that of the *odalan*, the entire assembly of the members should be present.

[2] See Belo 1949, Plate III, fig. B.

5: Belo E-5 (1931-1934)1935 OF7 Bali OF7

On the twelfth day after the birth of the twins the ceremony *nyambutin* was celebrated in the *kubu*. After *nyambutin* in Sukawanã the usual child and his parents are sufficiently purified to be allowed to enter the temples. Although for the family of I Lèwèr there still remained thirty days of exile, during which they might not even enter the village, much less the temples, still these small offerings had to be made according to custom.

During the last days the men of the village were busy at the *kubu* cutting trees into blocks for the chopping of the meat offerings, weaving rough trays of split bamboo, preparing skewers and sharpening knives for the feast. It is a part of the custom that the villagers must not only contribute to the offerings but lend their indispensable aid in the making of them, for it is an array such as no single family could prepare alone. In return they are treated to a feast at the expense of the father of the twins. In the houses of I Lèwèr's erstwhile neighbors the materials were collected. Each man sent his share, according to his means. If a rich man should send a poor contribution, he would be too ashamed! The women cooked the rice and formed it into little cones, and into cakes of varied shapes and colors, and of sugar and riceflour they made still other dainties for the gods and for the demons. They wove plates of palm-leaf, and decorative fanshaped, circular, and trailing *sampéans* as top-pieces for the offerings, all of the young yellow leaf cut with a knife in strong simple design. The part of the men is the killing and preparation of the animal offerings. On the day before the ceremony they killed the water-buffalo, skinned it, and cut and cooked the meat in various ways. The next morning the calf, pig, goat, goose, ducks, chickens, and the three-colored dog ('red', black and white) were killed and made ready. At eleven o'clock in the morning I Lèwèr's neighbors were still busy finishing the last dozens of palm-leaf decorations necessary for the offerings. When all was done the splendid array was laid out upon the bare ground where I Lèwèr's house had stood, and they were enough to completely

8: Hooykaas E-5 (ca. 1959) 1961 OF7 Bali OF7

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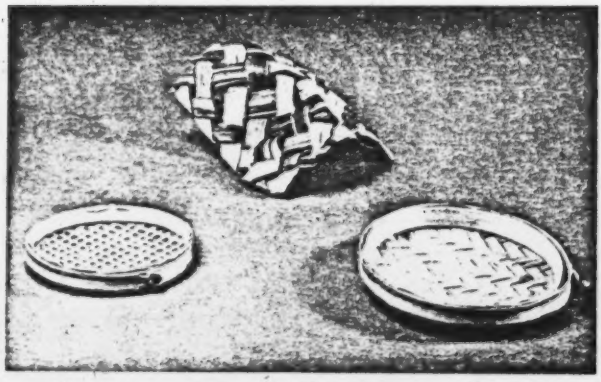

9. *sidi* 10. *tikĕh* 11. *ngyu*

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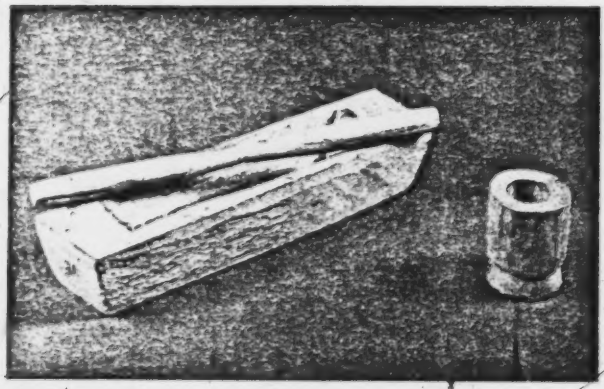

12. *lĕsung* 13. *luhu* 14. *kĭtung*

Bali OF7
Lombok OF12
Malays AN5
Borneo OC1
Java OE1

I [485 cont.]
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322 The dyeing of the strips to be plaited, which for colored plaited work is nearly always done beforehand, is also part of the preparatory work.

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322] The coloring is limited to the outer skin in the case of bamboo and rattan, whether this is done, as on Bali and Lombok, by smearing it with distemper and then covering it with a layer of getah, plant sap, or, as on Borneo and elsewhere, with dragon's blood (from Daemonorops draco Bl.) which penetrates the material even less, but gives a warm red color. The use of yellow dye on Lombok and blackening bamboo or rattan either with soot or by holding it above a smoky floating wick, after which the color is fixed by means of one or another of the local fruit-juices, are also very simple. In addition to these very primitive methods of coloring, there is the dyeing of the material by boiling it in a mixture of water and all kinds of vegetable dyes, red, black, brown, yellow, blue, green, and purple, after which the color is usually fixed by mud-baths; alum is also used as a fixative, for instance, in the Riau Archipelago, where, in addition to sapanwood, it is used to color the pandan strips red. Boiling in aniline dyes has also found acceptance and is successful provided that good quality dyes are used.

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The fingers are used primarily in plaiting and are very suitable because of their suppleness and delicacy. There are also very simple implements for use where the material is too fine for the fingers. In this case a plaiting hook for drawing the strips through the work is the primary tool; this plaiting hook has various forms.

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[413] In southeastern Borneo a plaiting bench is used, an oblong [486] rectangular table like a bench, with various associated instruments, which is used chiefly for making rattan mats. On Bagelan and among the Dajak [Dyak] weaving boards are used. Among the latter they are made and decorated by the boys to give to the girls as presents.

There is a plaiting board used in the plaiting of hats, in which a round hole is cut out to hold the crown of the hat. We shall only give a broad description of the plaiting technique because it is practically the same everywhere and because of space considerations. [Illustration appears here.]

Alkema & Bezemer - 626 E 4, 5 (no date) 1927 OB1 Indonesia OB1

Toradja OG11
New Guinea OJ1
Timor OF20
Batak OD5

Borneo OC1
Javanese OE5
Bali OF7
Nias OD11
Moluccas OH1

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[557 cont.]

the printing boards for tattooing and the carrying boards for children among the Dajak, the paddles of these people. Fine examples of what the Javanese can do in this field are found in the woodwork of the gamelang stands, the gong standards, and the batik racks.

Although the wood carving in the ancestral images is crude and is not on the same level with what the Balinese do on images of the gods, the wooden images from Nias and the images of the spirits from the Molúccas are certainly not without merit in plasticity despite the crudeness of execution. They cannot be compared, of course, with the images of demons and gods, commonly even images of priests, made on Bali. These Balinese images are often painted, but they are also carved out of sandlewood, and then the wood is left white.

Dwellings have been discussed elsewhere in this work. What decorative art is to be seen there, as well as in bridgebuilding, for which one must go to [558] the Toradja lands in central Celebes in particular, is, of course, similar to bamboo carving in ornamentation and line. [illustration appears here] but because the process is easier, the work is deeper and light and shadow are in greater contrast.

Bamboo carving, wood carving, and the working of bone and [559] horn are much alike, and where people and animals [illustration appears here] lived together, the material for making things of bone and horn was always at hand. The number of articles made from both of these materials, however, is very small.

Arrowheads of bone are found, but almost exclusively among the Papuans, who also use a dagger made of human bone. Arm and leg bands of bone are also present. The Batak of Upper Langkat have a bone calendar, an oblong, flat piece of bone with three rows, each with ten little holes, with which they reckon the days, and the people of Timor have lime tubes of bone, for which they take advantage of the hollow bones. These tubes are the counterparts of bamboo

[Text continues on p. 628]